United Nations A/53/169/Add.3

General Assembly

Distr.: General
16 October 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 71 (m)
General and complete disarmament: small arms

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

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98-30785 (E) 211098

South Africa

[Original: English]
[7 October 1998]

South Africa recognizes the important role of the United Nations in global efforts to curtail the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. In this regard, the report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms (A/52/298) of 27 August 1997 constitutes an important cornerstone of those efforts.

While arms control has traditionally focused on conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction, the devastation wrought by the proliferation of light weapons and small arms on socio-economic development generally, and specifically in the reconstruction of post-conflict societies, can no longer be ignored.

Within countries, unimpeded access to light weapons and small arms and the use of such weapons have increased the lethality of crime, violence, banditry and civil disobedience. Regionally, disarmament programmes, the demobilization of ex-combatants and reductions in military-industrial complexes are constrained by the existence of large amounts of poorly regulated and indiscriminately used light weapons and small arms.

The diffusion of existing stocks and the import of new weapons endangers the democratic pursuits which are being consolidated and negatively influences the ability of Governments to govern effectively, not only in African countries but around the world.

The challenge in addressing the proliferation of small arms is to marshal the necessary human and financial resources, encourage the sharing of reliable data among national departments and regional partners, coordinate action and raise the profile of the issue to gain the support of Governments, politicians and non-governmental organizations.

Furthermore, the illicit proliferation of small arms is closely linked to other criminal activities and must therefore be addressed within the context of other initiatives aimed at reducing crime. The close link between licit and illicit weapons must also be recognized and approaches to addressing the one must relate to the other both within countries and in regional initiatives.

Therefore, South Africa believes that:

(a) A holistic approach is necessary to address the problem. Concurrent action must be taken at the national, regional and international levels focusing on both licit and illicit small arms and light weapons;

(b) A regional initiative to control the proliferation of weapons in Africa is urgently needed.

Recommended course of action

Approach

Addressing the proliferation of light weapons and small arms in South Africa and its immediate region must be viewed from an inclusive perspective of arms control and disarmament, post-conflict peace-building, conflict prevention and socio-economic development.

Through the coordination of those approaches, a holistic national strategy should be developed that will assess and identify national priorities and determine achievable steps to be taken to contain and reduce the proliferation of weapons.

To reinforce national action, it is imperative that a regional approach be formulated to address the problem of the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons that is based on regional concerns and adopts an incremental approach. That will ensure that, as each region of the world develops an indigenous approach, the building blocks will be in place to effectively deal with the issue globally.

The focus areas in all instances should be placed on illicit and licit small arms and light weapons. Thus, national and regional approaches must be developed for both short-term and long-term gains which can have an impact on illicit as well as licit arms circulation.

Practical measures for coordination and cooperation

National

National efforts should focus on enhancing legislation and regulation to prevent legal small arms from becoming illegal through criminal activity, improving, as necessary, regulations on the import, export and transfer of light weapons and small arms, and increasing control over stocks of light weapons belonging to security forces.

Steps should also be taken to reduce the number of existing weapons through voluntary methods (including programmes of collection and destruction) and increasing the capacity of the security forces to identify, seize and destroy illicit weapons.

Regional

Regionally, an important confidence-building measure that will lead to long-term gains for regional cooperation and trust is for countries to ensure greater transparency in their transfers of small arms and light weapons.

In affected regions, countries and regional organizations should take immediate steps to stop the inflow of small arms and light weapons through increased cooperation, harmonization or transfer procedures, tighter border control and intelligence sharing. Attention must also be focused on the recirculation of existing stocks throughout the region and appropriate control measures devised, including increased cooperation among Governments regionally, joint operations and harmonization of priorities.

A cooperatives partnership should be established between Governments, international and regional organizations and the non-governmental community to mobilize public and political support. The role of the non-governmental community in assisting Governments in achieving that support and aiding in the compilation of reliable data regarding small arms and light weapons proliferation in all its aspects should be explored fully.

Steps taken to implement the recommendation of the report on small arms

The South African Government has declared the combating of small arms (firearms) proliferation a South African Police Service priority number one for 1998/99. A coherent strategy to deal with the proliferation of small arms in South Africa has been developed. The strategy represents an integral and holistic approach to introduce stricter control measures and to eventually remove the causal factors of small arms proliferation. In that regard, the National Firearms Plan is being implemented, which deals mainly with the problem of illegal small arms. The objective is to reduce the number of illegal small arms in circulation and to reduce the flow of illegal weapons into South Africa. It also concentrates efforts to ensure the lawful and proper use of licensed firearms.

South Africa has legislation which requires the licensing of all civilian possession of small arms (firearms), including a requirement for the safe storage of such small arms.

In addition, South Africa is committed to a policy of responsibility and accountability in the trade and transfer of all arms. South Africa has established an arms control system which makes provision for a ministerial control body, criteria, principles and guidelines to ensure the responsible transfer and trade in, among others, small arms and light weapons.

The South African Government has adopted a policy on the destruction of a surplus small arms, where appropriate. On 6 October 1997, the South African Police Service melted down 20 tons of firearms: a total of 4,504 confiscated firearms, including pistols, revolvers, rifles, shotguns and home-made firearms. The commercial value of the arms is estimated to be in excess of 2 million rand. Subsequently, the South African Police Service destroyed an additional 11 tons of confiscated ammunition and 10 tons of confiscated small arms, 9 tons of obsolete/outdated ammunition and 20 tons of redundant/obsolete small arms.

South Africa is further committed to stopping the flow of illegal small arms across its borders. South Africa has already entered into agreements with several southern African States with a view to curbing the trafficking of illegal small arms and ammunition. In that regard, the formal cooperation agreement between South Africa and Mozambique has resulted in more than 100 tons of small arms and ammunition being destroyed on site in Mozambique.

Views on the convening of an international conference

An international conference on small arms and light weapons should be held after 1999 to enable Governments and regional organizations to share their experiences, and to facilitate dialogue. The aim of the conference should be to increase cooperation and to avoid duplication of initiatives to ensure that scarce resources are utilized effectively. The conference should formulate an action plan to combat the proliferation problem on the basis of the experiences of indigenous regional approaches, which will have instituted measures to effectively deal with the issue globally.